

Winter and Holiday Tips for Private Lease Housing

The following are some tips from the USAG-Brussels Housing Office to help you through the holidays:

Going away? Turn your radiators down but not off. Keep the water under pressure and circulating to avoid a freeze in every room. Set the thermostat for at least 12 degrees centigrade and ensure all thermostatic valves for the radiators are on at least setting # 2. Do not shut off the electricity. Have a friend or neighbour check your house and furnace daily. Give your neighbour the phone numbers for your landlord and your landlord's technicians. The tenant is often responsible for damage due to freezing pipes.

For security reasons, have a friend or neighbour empty the mailbox. Set up your house to look as if someone is home. Use timer switches to turn on and off lights. Make sure valuables are not left exposed.

Know the name and phone number of the technicians your landlord would use for heating, plumbing, and electrical repairs.

Check your heating fuel tank to make sure you have more than enough fuel to get through the holidays. Heating fuel deliveries during the holidays are difficult and very expensive.

All furnaces and chimneys must be cleaned and adjusted annually, it's mandatory. It's a good idea to have the service done before the winter sets in. Ensure the air intake is not blocked which could restrict airflow and cause additional fuel consumption or a dangerous build-up of soot. Heating maintenance ensures that the furnace is operating safely and at optimum efficiency.

Pay attention to your gas and electric bill to ensure you are up to date. Note that even with a heating oil system, you must have electricity for the heating system to work.

Is your oil tank above ground? Are the pipes leading to the tank exposed to cold air? If so, you may ask your mazout (heating fuel) delivery technician to add antifreeze to your tank.

To prevent frozen water pipes and damage to your home, turn off and drain water lines feeding outside garden lines and spigots. Cover water lines and water meters that are exposed to the weather or located in an unheated area such as a shed or garage.

Emergency numbers during the holiday season (Housing Office is closed 23 Dec through 2 Jan):

Private Lease Quarters: Contact your landlord (tel no can be found on page 1 of your lease). Contact your landlord's technician. If you need assistance talking to your technician or landlord, the NSA MPs at DSN 368-9769 or CIV 02-717.97.69 can help. **Technicians often bill tenants directly after the service is complete during the holiday period, and be prepared that service costs during holidays are considerably higher.**

A list with help numbers is available in your housing office and on the housing information board.